

State of California
BOARD OF EQUALIZATION
SALES AND USE TAX REGULATIONS

Regulation 1705.1. INNOCENT SPOUSE RELIEF FROM LIABILITY.

References: Sections 6066, 6067, 6456, and 6901-6908, Revenue and Taxation Code.

(a) IN GENERAL. A spouse claiming relief from liability for any sales or use tax, interest, penalties, and other amounts shall be relieved from such liability where all the following requirements are met:

- (1) A liability is incurred under the Sales and Use Tax Law;
- (2) The liability is attributable to the nonclaiming spouse;
- (3) The spouse claiming relief establishes that he or she did not know of, and that a reasonably prudent person in the claiming spouse's circumstances would not have had reason to know of, the liability; and
- (4) It would be inequitable to hold the claiming spouse liable for the liability, taking into account whether the claiming spouse significantly benefited directly or indirectly from the liability, and taking into account all other facts and circumstances.

(b) "BENEFITED." Whether a claiming spouse has benefited directly or indirectly from the liability will be determined by a review by the Board of all of the available evidence. Normal support payment is not a significant benefit for purposes of this determination. Normal support is measured relative to each family's standard of living. The claiming spouse will not be deemed to have benefited directly or indirectly from the liability solely as a result of normal support unless his or her lifestyle significantly improved during the periods of liability. Gifts received by the claiming spouse, or lavish or luxury purchases made by either spouse may be evidence that the claiming spouse benefited directly or indirectly from the liability. Evidence of direct or indirect benefit may consist of transfers of property, including transfers which may be received several years after the calendar quarter in which the liability occurred. For example, if a claiming spouse receives from the other spouse an inheritance of property or life insurance proceeds which are traceable to the liability, the claiming spouse will be considered to have benefited from that liability. Other factors considered may include desertion of the claiming spouse by the other spouse or that the spouses have become divorced or separated subsequent to the periods of liability.

(c) ATTRIBUTION. The determination of the spouse to whom items of liability are attributable shall be made without regard to community property laws.

(1) A claim may be filed if, at the time relief is requested, the claiming spouse is no longer married to or is legally separated from the nonclaiming spouse, or the claiming spouse is no longer a member of the same household as the nonclaiming spouse.

(2) With respect to a liability incurred as a result of a failure to file a return or an omission of an item from the return, attribution to one spouse may be determined by whether a spouse rendered substantial services as a retailer of taxable items related to the liability. If neither spouse rendered substantial services as a retailer, then the attribution of the liability shall be treated as community property. A liability incurred as a result of an erroneous deduction or credit shall be attributable to the spouse who caused that deduction or credit to be entered on the return.

(d) WRITTEN REQUEST FOR RELIEF. To seek relief under these provisions, a claiming spouse may submit a written request for relief setting forth the seller's permit number, the period for which relief is requested, and the specific grounds upon which the request for relief is based.

(e) STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS. These provisions shall apply to all calendar quarters for claims made no later than one year after the Board's first contact with the spouse making the claim.

Regulation 1705.1. *(Continued)*

Claims made after one year from the Board's first contact with the spouse making the claim shall not apply to any calendar quarter that is more than

- five years from the return due date for nonpayment on a return, or
- five years from the finality date on the board-issued determination,
- whichever is later.

No calendar quarters shall be eligible for relief under this regulation that have been closed by res judicata.

(f) REFUNDS. A refund of any amounts under these provisions shall be subject to the requirements as set forth in Revenue and Taxation Code sections 6901 through 6908, inclusive.

(g) This regulation shall apply retroactively to liabilities arising prior to January 1, 1994.

(h) Effective January 1, 2001, a spouse may be relieved of liability for any unpaid tax or deficiency under the Sales and Use Tax Law if, taking into account all the facts and circumstances, it is inequitable to hold the spouse liable for such amount attributable to any item for which relief is not available under subdivisions (a) through (d). A spouse may be considered for equitable relief under this subdivision only after a written claim for relief as an innocent spouse has been filed pursuant to subdivision (d). A spouse whose claim for equitable relief is denied may request that the claim be reconsidered by the Board.

(1) Criteria for Equitable Relief.

(A) Factors that may be considered for the purpose of granting equitable relief include, but are not limited to:

1. The claiming spouse is separated (whether legally or not) or divorced from the nonclaiming spouse.
2. The claiming spouse would suffer economic hardship if relief is not granted.
3. The claiming spouse, under duress from the nonclaiming spouse, did not pay the liability. To substantiate "duress," the claiming spouse must provide objective evidence. "Objective evidence" can include, but is not limited to, such documents as police reports, restraining orders, or counseling reports.
4. The claiming spouse did not know and had no reason to know about the items causing the understatement or that the tax would not be paid.
5. The nonclaiming spouse has a legal obligation under a divorce decree or agreement to pay the tax. (This obligation will **not** be considered a positive factor if the claiming spouse knew or had reason to know, at the time the divorce decree or agreement was entered into, that the nonclaiming spouse would not pay the tax.)
6. The tax for which the claiming spouse is requesting relief is attributable to the nonclaiming spouse.

(B) Factors that may be considered for purposes of denying equitable relief include, but are not limited to:

1. The claiming spouse will not suffer economic hardship if relief is not granted.
2. The claiming spouse knew or had reason to know about the items causing the understatement or that the tax would be unpaid at the time the claiming spouse signed the return.
3. The claiming spouse received a significant benefit from the unpaid tax or items causing the understatement.
4. The claiming spouse has not made a good faith effort to comply with the Board's laws for the periods for which the claiming spouse is requesting relief or for subsequent periods of liability.
5. The claiming spouse has a legal obligation under a divorce decree or agreement to pay the tax.
6. The tax for which relief is being requested is attributable to the claiming spouse.

(2) Conditions for Relief. The following conditions apply to claims for equitable relief:

Regulation 1705.1. (Continued)

(A) The statutes of limitations provided for innocent spouse claims in subdivisions 1705.1(e) and (f) also apply to requests for equitable relief.

(B) Claims for equitable relief may be filed on liabilities incurred prior to January 1, 2001, including liabilities incurred prior to January 1, 1994, as provided in subdivision (g).

(i) The Board shall send notification by mail of the claim for relief from liability and the basis for that claim to the nonclaiming spouse.

History: Adopted July 31, 1997, effective December 5, 1997.

Amended June 20, 2001, effective October 20, 2001. Subdivision (c) – Existing language from second sentence on designated as new subdivision (c)(2). New subdivision (c)(1) added. New subdivisions (h) and (i) added.

Regulations are issued by the State Board of Equalization to implement, interpret or make specific provisions of the California Sales and Use Tax Law and to aid in the administration and enforcement of that law. If you are in doubt about how the Sales and Use Tax Law applies to your specific activity or transaction, you should write the nearest State Board of Equalization office. Requests for advice regarding a specific activity or transaction should be in writing and should fully describe the facts and circumstances of the activity or transaction.